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VANTAGE™
COMIC & CARD PICKS
number ten

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Vantage Comic & Card Picks
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February 1995.

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TOP PICK OF THE MONTH

Nira X #1-up (Express Publications / Entity Comics / 1st Nira title)

MORE VANTAGE PICKS

Flash #100 (DC Comics / New Flash)
Godwheel #0-3 (Marvel / Malibu / Ultraverse / Thor & Loki)
Impulse #1 (DC Comics / Popular little guy)
Leonard Nimoy's Primortals #4/variant (Big Ent. / Tekno•Comix / Variant)
Neil Gaiman's Mr. Hero #4/variant (Big Ent. / Tekno•Comix / Variant)
Samson #1/2 (Samson Comics / Tucci cover)
Solar, Man of the Atom #1-up (Voyager / Valiant / Dan Jurgens)
X-O Manowar #1-up (Voyager / Valiant / Bart Sears)
Zen #0 (Express Publications / Entity Comics / 1st Nira)
Zen Intergalactic Ninja #6/variant (Express Publications / Entity Comics / 1st Orbeta)

Watch for the Vantage Star indicating our top picks!

"The above pick list is a guide based on research, advisors' opinions, and staff opinions — keep in mind that even the experts will disagree. Comics can lose value after months or years. Read over the facts and opinions in Vantage, examine the pick list, and then make your own decisions. Remember: 1) There's no sure thing. Never bet the farm on any one book. 2) It may be fun to hunt for winners, but comics are even more fun to read! Open up one of those polybags and give comics a try!"

- Publisher Rob Golub

NO SCIENCE IN THE FICTION

I just saw Star Trek: Generations. I was not amused.

The movie was so disappointing, so ridiculous, so repulsive, that I simply must vent. This was not Star Trek.

Star Trek is all about characters you care for trying to overcome logical science fiction problems. That's the fun of it.

You know the people. You know the rules. Maybe the rules aren't perfect, but there's certainly more meat to them than you'd find in most other TV sci-fi. That's where the realism and the suspense come from.

Here's an example. Picard is transformed into a Borg. Sadly, we watch a beloved character violated by the cruel Borg technology, and we follow his ensuing recovery. Thus, a character we care about grapples with a logical science-fiction problem. The Borg have been explained as aliens who merge man with machine. We don't understand the technology, but it basically makes sense.

Where is the sense in Star Trek: Generations? Where is the science fiction? Why does the Nexus exist and can it be stopped? In an episode, the crew would more carefully analyze the Nexus and then grapple with the problem it presents. Instead, all concerned simply accept this obvious plot device and go after the bad guy instead, like we're watching some cheesy, rarely-rented sci-fi video.

One of the writers of Star Trek: Generations openly admitted that he has never even seen an episode of the original series. It showed.

I agree with pretty much everything that Corey has to say this month (and most months), except for his assertion that this was all very Star Trek.

On the contrary, there wasn't enough science in the fiction, and there wasn't enough character in the characters. Star Trek: Generations made me *long* for the real thing.

- Publisher Rob Golub

ANOTHER BAD GIRL HIT?

The three suddenly super-hot bad girls of comics, Shi, Vampirella, and Lady Death, just will not go away. Having successfully picked **Shi** #1-up before the first issue came out, **Vantage** has been searching for the next bad-girl-hit for months.

During our search, **Vantage** happened upon Oliver Isabedra, whom Entity Comics found in the Philippines. Isabedra was an incredibly talented young beginner, and **Vantage** focused the spotlight on him immediately. Isabedra and his **Aster** #1-2 have since gained considerable heat. We fully expect to see **Aster** hit some of the Top Ten lists in the near future.

Still, **Vantage** came away from our **Aster** coup unsatisfied, for our search was not over . . . **Aster** can't be the next Bad Girl hit. You see, we're not done. Thus, **Vantage** continued the search for someone worth presenting to you as another potential **Shi**.

In our quest, time and time again, **Vantage** came back to **Nira X**. We really didn't want to pick **Nira X**, since the book is published by the same company that puts out **Aster**, Entity Comics. It just didn't seem fair. However, in the end, we must follow our gut. It's that good ol' **Vantage** gut that has paid the rent so far, so we're not about to start ignoring it now.

Thus, we predict that the next Bad Girl hit could easily be Bill Maus's creator-owned **Nira X**. We're proud to stand next to **Nira X**. There are five reasons why: the artwork, the print run, the spin, the character, and the state of the market.

The Artwork. Just take a look at Bill Maus's art. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out how this eye-candy is going to play in the pages of **Nira X** #1. Plus, the story is pretty readable. This is not your typical artist-turned-writer trash, where the artist tries to prove something by making the book esoteric to the point where you can't figure it out.

The Print Run. Our estimate is a 15,000 book total. That's very, very low, and to be honest, some of you are going to have trouble finding this book at all (it's due out now). Any amount of heat attributed to a book with a 15,000 print run can blow it out of the water. Even this article could do the job (remember, a lot of you are dealers).

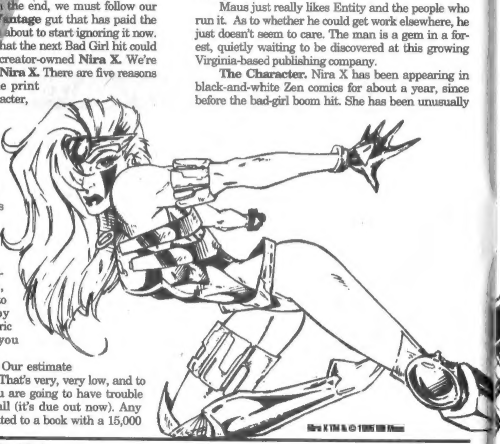
The Spin. The spin is the amount of personality that **Vantage** or other industry mags can give to the **Nira X** story. There's a lot to work with here. Bill Maus is a young guy who had his first work published in January of 1992, just three years ago. It was **X-Farce** for Eclipse. Maus's career has since progressed in three stages…

Year one: Maus produced over sixty books in one year, whereas the average artist might produce only twelve. On this he laughs, "In the first year of doing comics my secret was volume." Year two: "People started liking my work and I was amazed." Maus started receiving fan mail as his artwork continued to improve. Year Three: Maus put out some really gorgeous Zen books in 1994. With pleasure, we watched him grow.

When we asked him why he's not at Image, his answer startled us. "Well, I've never tried." You mean, you've never sent in artwork samples, asking for work? "No." To any major publisher at all? "No, never."

Maus just really likes Entity and the people who run it. As to whether he could get work elsewhere, he just doesn't seem to care. The man is a gem in a forest, quietly waiting to be discovered at this growing Virginia-based publishing company.

The Character. Nira X has been appearing in black-and-white Zen comics for about a year, since before the bad-girl boom hit. She has been unusually



ANOTHER DAD GIRL HIT? (continued)

popular in the fan mail. Now she makes her color debut in her own title for the first time. Maus terms her powers as being "elegant brute strength," and "two big guns." However, in **Nira X** #1-2 her powers will completely change thanks to major events in the character's continuity.

The State of the Back-Issue Market. The "bad-girl" syndrome, which at first seemed like it might slow down, has picked up more steam in recent months. Keep in mind that **Shi** #1 has several copies in print for every single copy of **Nira X** that will be out there.

Ahh, this is the kind of Top Pick of the Month that gets our blood going — living-on-the-edge, big-man-on-campus future picking. This is what **Vantage** was born to do. Due out now.

MARVEL'S THOR JOINS MALIBU'S GODWHEEL!
MAJOR VILLAIN TO SWITCH UNIVERSES!

The Mighty Thor, God of Thunder and his evil brother Loki will together make an appearance towards the end of Malibu Comics' **Godwheel** miniseries this January, according to sources close to Malibu Comics.

While Thor will only visit, Loki will also be joining the Ultraverse for six to twelve months, our sources tell us. Loki will eventually cause other characters to switch universes as well, our sources say. An additional unannounced surprise: The Godwheel book with Thor's appearance will be drawn by Malibu's resident hot artist, George Perez.

Vantage expects interest in Thor's **Godwheel** appearance to ride high because: (1) News of Marvel's purchase of Malibu is still fresh & hot. (2) These **Godwheel** back-issues are the starting point for the Ultraverse in 1995. The entire story will relate back to them, our sources tell us. (3) The Godwheel concept, introduced for the first time in this mini, will be a central part of the Ultraverse. It was developed even before the Ultraverse launch. (4) **Godwheel** will be a central starting point for the on-going activities of Loki, who is scheduled to remain in the Ultraverse for some time, jumping from title to title. (5) Malibu promises to promote this thing heavily, "pulling out all the stops." (Malibu is known for strong promotion.) (6) Loki will be utilized to transfer other villains or heroes between the companies, which should cause future readers to wonder what the heck happened in that **Godwheel** thing anyway?

Thor TM & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Godwheel™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc.

The bottom line? **Godwheel** has the potential for serious heat, especially given the fact that the top ten lists seem somewhat barren lately. Look for fans who are fascinated by the big buy to jump all over this thing.

Here's our favorite part of the equation. Even if **Godwheel** doesn't blow right out, Malibu has made the series 50% returnable. This is a very unusual high-risk move designed to push sales upward. In other words, stores can give back what they don't sell (as long as they sell at least half), so there should be

What's a Godwheel?

Acclaimed science-fiction novelist Larry Niven came up with the Godwheel concept. It's a disc-like world that was once ruled by an elder god named Argus. He has returned to attempt to rule it again. To accomplish this, Argus must obtain three talismans, which would grant him full godhood. Argus recruits the Ultras to come and help him, but the good Ultras revolt and decide to fight him. How the heck Thor fits in, we have no idea.

THOR JOINS MALIBU'S GODWHEEL! (continued)

NO **Godwheel** books in the fifty-cent boxes. This book should hold at cover price or better. Oh man, **Vantage** loves the picks that just add right up like this.

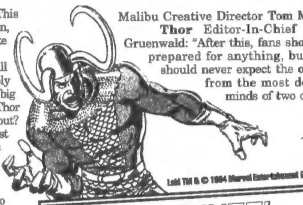
Vantage has learned that Thor and Loki will likely be introduced in the same issue, probably towards the end of the four-week mini. That's our big pick ... the **Godwheel** book that first contains Thor and Loki. So exactly what book are we talking about? We'd like to give you an issue number, but we just don't have enough confidence in our info at this time to put **Vantage** credibility on the line here. Here's a hint. Think final, as in towards the end.

Vantage has learned from sources close to Malibu and Marvel that Thor will most likely be a mere temporary visitor while the villain Loki will likely remain in the Ultraverse universe for quite some time. He will jump from title to title, causing trouble throughout the universe.

Thor's appearance in **Godwheel** is not just a gimmick, Malibu told **Vantage.** Malibu and Marvel have been planning the appearance for more than 60 days prior to Marvel's acquisition of Malibu.

"We aren't saying how long Thor will be staying, but he will be setting into motion the plot points that will wind through the Ultraverse until the end of 1995, leading to Marvel/Malibu projects," said **Godwheel** Editor Dan Danko.

The Marvel villain's appearances will trigger specific plot points in the Ultraverse that will tie in to what Ulm called the "Ultraverse Spine," a linear time line of Ultraverse and Marvel projects that runs from January 1995 to December 1995. "When **Godwheel** ships, expect to see a tremendous amount of industry attention focused on the Ultraverse and Marvel," said Malibu Creative Director **Tom Mason. Thor** Editor-In-Chief **Mark Gruenwald:** "After this, fans should be prepared for anything, but they should never expect the obvious from the most devious minds of two coasts!"



GODWHEEL ONCE A WEEK!

Godwheel is a four-issue self-contained mini-series, with #0 due out in mid-January and #3 due out in mid-February.

- **Godwheel** #0 $2.50. Ultraverse baddie seeks to rule Godwheel, the home of the gods.
- **Godwheel** #1 $2.50. First Primevil. Ultra-heroes get involved.
- **Godwheel** #2 $2.50. Ultra-heroes work in groups. One of the Freex dies.
- **Godwheel** #3 $2.50. "The ultimate conclusion," says Malibu. A turning point for Mantra.

COMIC STORE SEARCHED! HOW TO HELP!

Shooting Star Comics of Glendale, California has been searched by police, who seized 25 adult comic books, according to a Comic Book Legal Defense Fund statement.

The store's owner, Sam Silbert, was charged with "display of indecent material," a prohibition which exists only in a few states according to the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, which is representing Silbert.

The CBLDF says the confiscated comics include several Eros books from Fantagraphics as well as books from Last Gasp, Kitchen Sink, Boneyard, and Re-Visionary. The police have not yet provided a complete list of the books they seized.

This makes the sixth case the CBLDF, a non-profit organization, has taken on in defense of First Amendment rights in the comic-book industry. Since it began in 1988, the CBLDF has spent over $100,000 to ensure free speech for comic writers. Since **Vantage** can be a tad on the controversial side itself, we are proud to support freedom of expression as best we can.

To help support the CBLDF, you may order a $2 black-and-white pin from them, which sports the nifty slogan, "I read banned comics." T-shirts bearing other catchy phrases are also available for $20. There is no fee for postage or handling, so just send a check to: CBLDF, P.O. Box 693, Northampton, MA 01061.

This makes the sixth case the CBLDF, a non-profit organization, has taken on in defense of First Amendment rights in the comic-book industry.

For more information and details on how to make contributions, contact Susan Alston at the CBLDF office (413) 586-6967.

VOYAGER CHANGES NAME, CUTS TITLES, MAKES OTHER MAJOR CHANGES!

Voyager will change its name to Acclaim Comics, bring on big name talent, cut half of its titles, and make other big changes, said Voyager Marketing Vice President Marty Stever. The big changes are as follows:

Dan Jurgens Joins Valiant

Dan Jurgens will write and pencil **Solar.** He will no longer pencil **Superman,** but he will continue to write it. Jurgens is famous for his role in creating the Death of Superman and Zero Hour success stories.

Though there's no plan for a "Death of Valiant" type storyline, Stever does promise "an epic Solar storyline" that will be "mind-boggling." Valiant books don't sell like they used to and this should help. Solar back-issues can be picked up for peanuts and we've made them picks without reservation.

Those of you who are thinking, "Get with the program **Vantage,** the Valiant boom is over and **Solar** is not going to heat up," might be wise to remember how hot Superman was before Jurgens came along. Not very.

Voyager Is Now Acclaim

Voyager is changing their name to Acclaim Comics. Look for Acclaim Comics in **Previews** and **Advance,** not Voyager. Under Acclaim, there will be various sections: Windjammer, now devoted to all creator-owned projects; Armada, a new imprint for licensed titles; Valiant, featuring the Valiant universe. Voyager has been a division of the Acclaim software company of Long Island, New York since it was purchased last summer for sixty-five million dollars in cash and stock.

Valiant Makes Cuts, Doubles Frequency

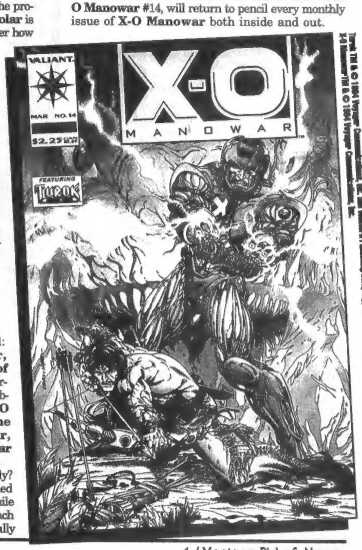
The following titles are now cancelled: **Harbinger, Armorines, Geomancer, H.A.R.D. corps, Psi-Lords, Second Life of Dr. Mirage,** and **Secret Weapons.** The generally better-selling titles are here to stay, now published twice a month! Those titles are: **X-O Manowar, Bloodshot, Turok, Ninjak, The Visitor, Timewalker, Eternal Warrior, Magnus.** Also, published monthly will be **Solar** and **Shadowman.**

So why are most titles going twice-monthly? Voyager surveys and research have determined that the typical store has slots for 300 comics while there are currently 800 new comics published each month, said Stever. Apparently this issue is really on publishers minds, for Malibu's Scott Rosenber also emphasized it in his interview with **Vantage** last month. Stever said that Voyager's survey also found that consumers enter a store every ten days on the average.

In addition, Stever said that Diamond and Capital sales charts show a constant settling period for most books, except for those that are published weekly. His examples were **Spider-Man, Batman,** and the **X-Men** titles, which can be viewed as essentially weekly issues of the same book. Also people like to read their favorite comics more than once a month, said Stever. These factors have caused Voyager to rethink their "publication cycle."

Beyond Jurgens

Bart Sears who drew the now-famous cover to **X-O Manowar** #14, will return to pencil every monthly issue of **X-O Manowar** both inside and out.



VOYAGER... MAJOR CHANGES! (continued)

Norm Breyfogle of **Prime** fame will draw **Bloodshot.** Ron Marz and Andy Smith will also join the X-O team. Other new Valiant creators will include Jackson Guice, Paul Gulacy, and Mike Manley.

With this move Valiant essentially abandons their policy of selling by way of story and continuity but not artwork. X-O Manowar is a great character, now with a great artist. Here is another that could make a heated come-back with a mega-artist like Sears at the helm.

Armada To Publish Magic

After months of behind-the-scenes courting, Wizards of the Coast has chosen Voyager to publish comics based on their **Magic: The Gathering** card game. Industry insiders expected that Magic would go to Dark Horse or Malibu, given their extensive licensing experience.

Voyager's new licensing imprint, Armada, will launch two **Magic** minis. Although the names will change, look for about two minis to remain always in print. The first mini due out in early 1995 will be based on the Ice Age expansion set. It will come out in March, before the cards come out in May! It will be a back story for the cards, with more story-type information than can be conveyed in the collectable cards format.

Magic is hot, hot, hot, and this is a real coup for Voyager.

Acclaim And TCI Join Forces

In other Voyager news, Acclaim Entertainment and cable giant TeleCommunications, Inc. are forming a new company that will develop a new standard game platform and software. As part of the deal, TCI, the nation's largest cable operator, will buy 10% of Acclaim.

Pending Acclaim's shareholders approving and regulatory approval, TCI will own 35% of the new company and Acclaim will own 65%. Note that this is not a merger, it is a joint venture.

WIZARDS OF THE COAST GOES BEYOND FANDOM!

Wizards of the Coast is expanding its gaming line beyond the realm of science fiction and fantasy with its introduction of its first "social card game," The Great Dalmuti.

The game is due out in February of 1995.

The Great Dalmuti is another creation of Richard Garfield, the mastermind behind Magic: The Gathering. "The Great Dalmuti is a family card game with the simplicity of Uno and the beauty of Magic," said Garfield.

The Great Dalmuti is designed for five to eight players. "The player at the head of the table is called the Greater Dalmuti. The person is like a king," says Glenn Elliott, Great Dalmuti Project Coordinator.

Where the players sit determines their social class. The player sitting to the left of the Greater Dalmuti is called the Lesser Dalmuti. This person is the second-highest player. Seated on the right of the Greater Dalmuti are the Greater Peon and the Lesser Peon. These are the lowest players in the game. The remaining players are classified as merchants and sit between the Dalmutis and the Peons.

Where you stand on the social ladder has its advantages and disadvantages. The Greater Dalmuti always starts the game. The Greater Peon gets to shuffle the deck and deal out the cards. Both Peons must give their best cards to the Dalmutis before each game. "Struggling against the odds is a lot of fun," says Garfield. "Each game ends with players changing seats to mirror the new social order. A player can be a Peon in one game and the Greater Dalmuti in the next."

Garfield feels that he has combined the best elements of several existing games in creating The Great Dalmuti. "The game is easy to learn and can be played by children and their parents."

TEKNO•COMIX VARIANT COVERS!

Two Tekno•Comix comic books will soon arrive in stores with variant covers, according to sources close to Tekno•Comix.

Retailers will be surprised to discover that **Leonard Nimoy's Primortals** #4 and **Neil Gaiman's Mr. Hero** #4 will arrive with two different covers each next month. Although the breakdowns are not yet available, **Vantage** expects that each variant cover will comprise about 20% of each full print run.

In another rare move, the 20% edition will be made difficult to discern. They will appear to be exactly the same as the regular cover at first glance. However, upon closer inspection, the variations will be easy to find.

The 20% editions of the covers will each come with a special edition trading card which may be gold foil stamped. The 80% editions will each feature a coupon. Combine the two coupons with one more (third coupon location is as yet unknown), mail 'em in, and you'll get a special "steel-embossed" Neil Gaiman book. Pretty neat stuff, eh?

Vantage applauds these moves as having the potential to stir up additional interest. Readers and retailers alike thus far have been commenting favorably on Tekno books, most especially **Leonard Nimoy's Primortals**, which has been burning holes in quite a few racks. With a little luck and continued good reading, these variant covers could heat up nicely.

In 1995, **Leonard Nimoy's Primortals** will feature new alien races that may spin off into their own books. A certain established character will die, according to Tekno sources. We have yet to pin them down to an issue.

***Leonard Nimoy's Primortals* #4 and *Neil Gaiman's Mr. Hero* #4 will arrive with two different covers each next month.**

In April, Teknophage gets his own book, possibly without Comics Code approval. In May, look for **Lady Justice** #1 and **Mike Danger** #1. For the summer of 1995, look for new Neil Gaiman books, bringing the total up to four. **Wheel of Worlds** will be the centerpiece to Neil Gaiman's corner of the Tekno universe.

Perhaps most exciting is this summer's coming Isaac Asimov book. Science fiction grand master Isaac Asimov had submitted a story concept to a small company before he passed away, and Tekno now plans to turn it into a comic book. Tekno sources are sketchy with the details at this point, but we'll definitely see a super-hero style team, originally developed by Asimov.

Leonard Nimoy's Primortals ™ & © 1994 Big Entertainment, Inc.

1995 MARKET PREDICTIONS:

HOT ARTIST TREND FROM '80s TO RETURN?

Remember Byrne on *Fantastic Four*, Simonson on *Thor*, and Miller on *Daredevil*? Top artists are supposed to heat up books.

These are changing times. The best-selling comic in the nation now sells about a third of what it once did. Rumors of additional company cut-backs abound. The comic book industry is going through a tough period. I hear rumors of top artists unable to find work, publishers with financial problems, and stores on the edge.

That's the bad news. There is good news too. The market does seem to have reached a floor. That is, it shouldn't dip much lower. Many stores are reporting that sales have picked up, or are at least remaining steady. **Vantage** expects this sort of slow but steady market to persist for some time, perhaps until the next big boom.

Today's slow and steady market comes with three steady back-issue trends:

Bad Girl comic books, **Shi, Vampirella,** and **Lady Death** have emerged as The Big Three. **Nira, Helina, Wonder Woman,** and **Aster** (sort of) are some of the best candidates for the almost inevitable number four slot. Bad Girl comics, once thought by many to be a flash in the pan, may last until the summer and beyond. **Wizard™** is pushing Lady Rawhide from Zorro, but **Vantage** is concerned that the character could be too goofy. **Vantage** is shocked that not a single major publisher has yet attempted to capitalize on the Bad Girl syndrome. The big boys have been sitting back and allowing these smaller publishers to have all the fun. Why? We have no idea.

Gen 13. The kids love this book. It's X-Men without all of the history, with Lee-quality art and babes to boot. **Gen 13** is about to enjoy a huge push from Image. This team book is not going anywhere.

X-Men. Marvel's only mistake so far is that they should have been out in full force, telling us that some of the changes over the next four months will be permanent. If readers don't feel this to be true, what's the point of picking up the books? Still, the relevant back-issues are hot and the story should sell well.

The next trend? Apparently about to emerge is an old friend: The hot artist trend. Remember the Eighties when a hot new artist's presence on a book brought tremendous heat to the book? Like Liefeld on **New Mutants**, Texiera on **Ghost Rider**, McFarlane on **Amazing Spider-Man**, and Jim Lee on **X-Men**?

The market changed in the early nineties. Back-issue prices went from artist-driven to story-driven,

Long-Term Picks For 1995

For those of you who would like to buy some comics and stick 'em in a shoe box for a few years, now's the time to do it. With print runs for all books having dropped considerably, the old mainstays are looking good. There are three titles that we refer to as The Three Sisters: **X-Men, Uncanny X-Men,** and **Amazing Spider-Man.** These titles are so central, so important, so full of history (well, sort of, for **X-Men**) and so eternally popular that it seems they will never lose steam. Back-issues always do nicely, and this should prove to be especially true for low-print-run, mid-1990s issues.

1995 MARKET PREDICTIONS (continued)

company-driven, and sometimes gimmick-driven. Instead of the right artist on the right book, people looked for the right story elements or the right universe. People didn't seem to care very much who drew **Rai #0**, **Sword of Azrael #1**, or **Solar #1**. The bottom line was that these books were a #0 from Valiant, a key Knightfall-related book, and an early Valiant universe book respectively. Nor did people seem to care which individual Image back-up artist did which book. If it had an "I" on the cover it was hot.

Story-driven after-market excitement still takes place today, in the form of the X-Men and Spider-Man storylines. Universe-driven back-issue movement, however, is pretty much dead. It is instead the old hot creator syndrome from the '80s that is starting to show new signs of life. We see some of it in the fans of the Bad Girl comics. **Shi** fans don't seem interested in seeing a Crusade Comics universe. Rather, they want to know what Bill Tucci is planning on doing next. It's a whole new way of thinking. Actually, it's an old way. It's the '80s way.

Vantage will cover new artists and writers increasingly. Dealers should watch the racks carefully. Get back into that '80s habit of looking at the names on the covers that impress you. A comic book publisher's best bet would be to place a hot, young unknown on a book that has traditionally had very poor artwork. The extreme contrast, à la Platt **Moon Knight,** could boil that pot right over. See our **Zen** and **Nira** articles for examples of artists who are simmering.

So why is the hot artist syndrome returning? Because that's the way things are supposed to be. It was like that for years. Remember Byrne on **Fantastic Four**, Simonson on **Thor,** and Miller on **Daredevil?** Top artists are supposed to heat up books. It just hasn't been happening very much over the past few years because flashy covers and new universes have distracted collectors.

Comics as a marketplace is moving back to where it is supposed to be. Dealers and publishers who recognize this early will stand the best chance of coming out ahead. Remember, you read it here first.

HOT NEW ARTIST DRAWS 2,500 PRINT RUN

Zen Intergalactic Ninja #6 has just arrived in stores with an alternate cover sporting artwork from a talented new artist, Joel Orbeta.

The Orbeta alternate cover has been limited to a low 2,500 copies and is being distributed randomly. The alternate cover will be this hot young artist's first published work.

Orbeta's artwork is striking to the point where the distributors have agreed to give Entity Comics several color promotional pages in their catalogs. Internal Correspondence, a newsmagazine for specialty retailing recently reported, "Entity is building a reputation for discovering unknown artists and turning them into popular creators."

"Darkly dramatic and powerful, in-your-face Zen" is how Zen co-creator Dan Cote describes the talent of Joel Orbeta, who will soon draw a new Zen solo mini-series.

While Orbeta has never been published in comic-book form before, he has extensive experience airbrushing comic designs on T-shirts for a New York retailer. In fact, that is how Zen writer Steve Stern discovered him.

Stern first saw Orbeta's work "on the back of a kid strolling through a mall. I literally grabbed the kid and asked him where he got his shirt. That's how I eventually tracked Joel down."

Orbeta, a Philipino-American, lists Frank Miller and Jack Kirby as major influences. The "intensive imagery and explosive storytelling" of Miller, and Kirby's "ability to create interesting new characters, both good and evil," are what Orbeta strives to emulate.

"The new solo storyline is as intense as anything I've seen recently," says Orbeta, "and I'd have to say that it's an honor to be given this opportunity. I don't intend to let anyone down."

Zen Intergalactic Ninja™ & © 1995 Zen Comics, Inc.

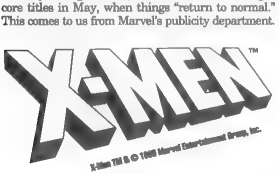
VANTAGE QUICKIES

Spidey Gets A Face-Lift

Beginning this month, covers of every **Spider-Man** title will sport brighter, crisper colors through an advanced level of separations. In addition, **Spider-Man's** paper quality will be upgraded.

X-Men Changes Don't Mean New Titles

Contrary to popular belief, returning X-Men titles will not compete with new ones when changes in X-Men take place. Eight core titles will be sold in January through March, and there will still be eight core titles in May, when things "return to normal." This comes to us from Marvel's publicity department.



FAO Schwarz Opens Marvel Shop

Make sure to stop at FAO Schwarz, New York City's premier toy store, on your next visit to the Big Apple (if you weren't planning to already, that is).

They've just added a Marvel Shop featuring loads of Marvel stuff, displays you can play with, fiber-optic wonders, and character sculptures. And pretty soon, a life-size, web-slinging Spider-Man will be swinging into the shop. You won't be the only one visiting: Marvel characters will also drop by once in a while.

DC Year One

DC will begin offering "Year One" annuals in early 1995, running through the summer. The annuals will focus on the first year of each title's history. Among the first Year One annuals will be **Superman: Man of Steel**, and **Robin**, currently scheduled for around March of 1995.

Tekno Prizes

Okay, we told you that the secret prizes in the Tekno contest were these cool limited trading cards. Guess what? There's more! Some winners will receive extra-limited cards at random. These extra-limited cards will feature some of the hottest Tekno cover art and gold-foil stamping. When you get your card, be sure to check it to see if you've received one of the extra-limited cards!

A New Kind of Adaption

One of the biggest movies to hit the screen in summer of 1995 will also, strangely enough, be a Dark Horse Comic. The flick is to be called **Species**, with special effects from the same group that did Aliens. The Dark Horse Comics adaption will be unusual in that the first issue will be a prelude, followed by the actual adaption, followed by an epilogue. Pretty neat, eh? Plus, Dark Horse is working on trying to get the screenwriter to script this unusual miniseries.

The Big Guy & Rusty The Boy Robot

Laugh all you want. Go ahead, yuck it up. Silly title, right? Hey, Frank Miller's writing it, so how about a little more reverence here? Much better. Both the Big Guy and Rusty first appear in **Madman #6-7**. They'll be getting their own title in 1995. Rusty's a

VANTAGE QUICKIES (continued)

super-powered robot and the Big Guy's a walking armory. Also for the summer, look for two Miller minis, **Martha Washington Saves The World** and a **Sin City** project.

John Byrne Next Men Relaunch

After a period of absence, John Byrne is relaunching **John Byrne's Next Men** in May. Byrne had left Next Men to concentrate on **Babe. The** new **Next Men** miniseries is to be called **Pain.** Byrne has a devoted fan-following, and **Next Men** back-issues are usually steady. Those who haven't heard of the **Next Men's** return might be willing to part with their back-issues for next to nothing. So, the choice is yours. Rip off old-lady **Next Men** fans, or not? You decide.

Byrne's Babe's Numbers

Byrne's **Babe** miniseries is to be followed up by — guess what — **Babe2** and **Babe3** in 1995. Look for **Babe2** #1-2 starting in February (are you following all of this numbering stuff?) and **Babe3** in July of 1995. With the success of early **Next Men** back-issues, the consistent high quality of Byrne's art and story, the near-cult status Byrne has with his fans, and his apparent long-term commitment to **Babe, Vantage's** interest in this character has been piqued.

Gen 13 Shall Return

Gen 13, the Image book that **Vantage** predicted would be a hit, is currently one of the hottest titles in the nation, and its short hiatus is coming to an end.

Look for **Gen 13** #1 to kick off a new regular series towards the end of March. A few weeks beforehand look for **Gen 13 Rave,** a behind-the-scenes look at the series. WildStorm plans on giving **Gen 13** a nice, big push. Keep your eyes out for a **Gen 13 Wizard™** cover, a **Previews** cover, and a huge push in **Advance Comics. Gen 13** should stay hot for many months to come.

WildStorm Crossover in 1995...Weird

WildStorm will take the unusual task of having crossovers in all of their titles in May of 1995. What's really weird about this is that you'll need to read the

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VANTAGE QUICKIES (continued)

whole line in the month of May to understand what's going on. This is a marketing strategy that WildStorm's competitors have mostly abandoned in recent months. With the large number of titles to choose from today, many publishers have decided that few collectors have the cash to read an entire universe. Thus, crossovers have been said to actually hurt sales.

WildStorm marketing defends their decision by pointing out that collectors will have to shell out cash for all of these titles for only one month. Also, **Vantage** feels compelled to point out that WildStorm is in the driver's seat right now thanks to the soaring popularity of **Gen 13** with the kids. This will be WildStorm's first crossover to involve every title. There will be two bookend issues, due out in early and late May. Jim Lee remains on hiatus, though he will be involved in general plotting.

X-Men/WildC.A.T.S Crossover?

Jim Lee is arranging a crossover with another company — some "old friends," our sources tell us. This is something that fans have been asking for, and Lee has now figured out a way to give it to them, say our sources. X-Men/WildC.A.T.S? We hope so.

McFarlane and WildStorm Trade

WildStorm will market and produce a Spawn card set for Todd McFarlane and in return, McFarlane will produce Wetworks toys in 1995, said a WildStorm spokesman.

The Spawn cards will be drawn by a variety of artists, including a few from the Toddler himself. The set will include a sneak preview of Spawn's new costume. Jim Lee will draw at least one of the cards as well.

Stormwatch #25 As Promised

Just as Image promised, **Stormwatch** #25 will be reprinted in July of '95, right after #24. You may remember that Image published #25 last year, promising that it would fit right in with continuity. Image staffers take pride in the fact that #25 will be reprinted as is, with no changes (except in the indicia) in the text or art. This stands as a testament to their commitment to plotting out a story, months or years in advance, that can come together sensibly.

Star Trek Gaming Cards Heat Up

The hot item of the moment is the Star Trek: The Next Generation card game, right on the heels of Magic: The Gathering. Also hot is Jyhad. The bottom line? It's not just Magic that's hot anymore. It's the concept: collectible card games.

Tucci Cover Underplayed

It's incredibly underplayed and nearly impossible to notice in the advance order catalogs. By George, it's a Bill Tucci cover. **Samson** #1/2 will feature a cover penciled by Bill Tucci. The page art is a "dream team" of about a billion or so new artists. Formerly Flashpoint Comics, Samson Comics debuts in February with **Samson** #1/2.

Marvel To Cut Titles

Marvel Entertainment Group is planning on making substantial title cuts, according to sources close to the company. The company has already begun to reduce editorial staff to prepare for the cuts. The trend continues: Less glut, more quality. Universe and crossover marketing just will not keep low-end titles afloat anymore. Readers want high-quality individual books.

Have You Got The Impulse?

As **Vantage** predicted long before anybody cared, **Flash** #92 and its Impulse intro have been heating up. Since then, an exciting storyline has been leading up to **Flash** #100, where we'll meet a whole new Flash. That's the kind of wording we're faced with, the crap that could still make it the same old Flash. Keep an eye on upcoming **Impulse** #1. Writer Mark Waid is heating up quickly and Impulse is pretty popular. The low $1.50 cover price should help keep the aftermarket from getting scared off.

QUICKIES (continued)

Shi #1 Reprint

Crusade Comics will soon be offering a **Shi** #1 Fan Appreciation Edition, reprinting **Shi** #1. Creator-owner Bill Tucci also reports that he has entered into negotiations to create a Shi movie.

DC Puts Alex Ross and Mark Waid Together

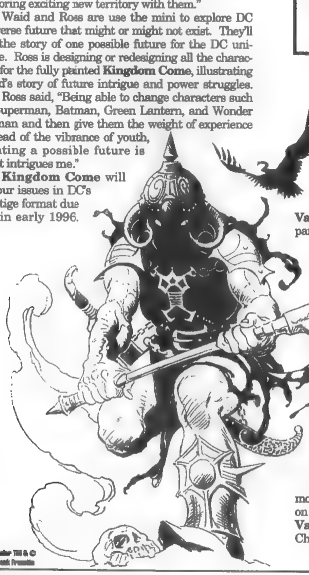
Artist Alex Ross (**Marvels**) and writer Mark Waid (**Flash, Impulse**) will together create an elseworlds miniseries called **Kingdom Come.** These two creators are among the hottest up-and-comers in the industry today, thanks in part to the overwhelming success of Marvels and Flash.

"The first pages have come in and they're absolutely stunning," said DC Publisher Paul Levitz, "Mark and Alex are taking our classic characters and exploring exciting new territory with them."

Waid and Ross are use the mini to explore DC universe future that might or might not exist. They'll tell the story of one possible future for the DC universe. Ross is designing or redesigning all the characters for the fully painted **Kingdom Come**, illustrating Waid's story of future intrigue and power struggles.

Ross said, "Being able to change characters such as Superman, Batman, Green Lantern, and Wonder Woman and then give them the weight of experience instead of the vibrance of youth, creating a possible future is what intrigues me."

Kingdom Come will be four issues in DC's prestige format due out in early 1996.



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Entity's Aster #1 Sells Out

The first issue of **Aster** #1 sold out of its entire 40,000 print run quickly, according to Entity Comics and other **Vantage** sources. Overseas the book is an even faster success. **Comic League** magazine, in a survey of over 20 stores in Hong Kong and the Far East, showed **Aster** ranking #4 on their "hot sheet." A second printing of **Aster** #1 has already been planned for March. **Aster** #1-up are former **Vantage** picks, as is the coming 25% edition of #3 in particular.

Verotik Publishes Rare Frazetta Art

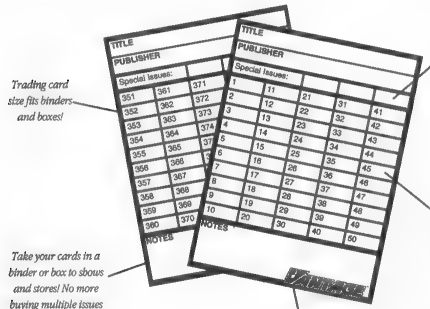
Frank Frazetta, arguably one of the best illustrators ever to work in comics, will do the covers to **Deathdealer** #1. He'll also be "heavily involved in the series' direction and production," according to a Verotik statement.

Keep an eye on Verotik and its rare offerings of that sweet Frazetta stuff.

Extreme Studios 1995 Plans

Rob Liefeld's Extreme Studios intends to become more of a multi-media company, with a greater focus on non-comic items, spokesman Matt Hawkins told **Vantage.** For example, look for a Badrock and a Chapel toy due out in mid-January.

Get organized at up to 50% off!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OFFER EXPIRES MARCH 15, 1995

HELLINA #1

What could be better than a number one issue? How about a number one issue featuring one of comicdom's bad girls? Hellina comes to us from the second tier of evil babes — those that are heating up, but haven't reached Shi or Lady Death intensity yet.

Still, the artwork is gorgeous, and the writing is definitely top-notch stuff. Writer/creator Steve Zyskowski really outdid himself this time!

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BAD GIRLS GONE GOOD

Every now and then Good Girl art makes a comeback, and in 1994 it did so by way of the Bad Girls — a story that comic buyers are all aware of. While the trend seems near its end thanks to an oversupply, one last card set should be a success — the Vampirella Super Premium cards from Topps. Unlike most of the other bad girls, Vampi has been around for decades, and this set features artwork from some of the old Warren magazines — art that should attract collectors who may not have been involved with Lady Death or Shi.

Following a trick used a few times before, Topps is keeping the price per box down by using 24-pack boxes. This still leaves packs selling for about $2, but makes the boxes much cheaper than the comparable Lady Death cards.

The list of names of artists involved with this set is like a Who's Who of current hot artists, but the set also includes a number of photos of the model who has gone to shows as Vampirella. The backs of some of the cards even have photos of Vampirella memorabilia which avid collectors will want a glimpse of.

Vantage expects these cards to sell much bet-

VANTAGE Card Picks

- Vampirella Super Premium Cards
- Star Trek: Next Generation Gaming Cards Factory Sets
- Pyramid #12
- Lois & Clark: New Adventures of Superman Portrait Chase Cards

ter than the Lady Death cards, primarily due to the broader appeal they will have. In addition to the regular chase cards, serious collectors should start early to collect two special sets: five 3 by 5 cards (inserted one per box) and a set of the gold foil cards (one per pack).

CHASE CARDS EVERYWHERE

Fleer sent shockwaves through the market in 1994 when it released a set of cards that had a price tag of $4 per pack. The Fleer Flair Marvel cards sold better than expected, but the price kept a lot of people out of the market. Worse still, boxes of Flairs are still advertised at less than the initial price dealers paid for their initial orders. While this situation may change with time, at the moment it sends a chill over orders for this year's Flair release, now renamed the 1995 Flair Marvel Annual.

That name gives Vantage pause: 1995 Annual? These cards feature primarily artwork from the 1995 comics. One of the reasons for the limited success of the 1994 cards was the inclusion of artwork from throughout Marvel's history, artwork which attracted the older collectors who could afford them. Very few of the younger readers can afford these expensive cards, and few of the older collectors still read the comics — just look at the failures of the Marvel sets which featured 2099 characters on the chase cards!

"The potential for these boxes to nose-dive is real, so be careful out there!"

The timing of these cards is troublesome as well, coming out so soon after so many other Marvel sets. There are still kids out there buying packs of Marvel Universe 1994 cards, and they haven't even started on the Marvel Masterpiece cards or the 1995 Fleer Ultra X-Men cards. When are they going to have money to buy the new Flair cards?

Chase card inflation continues as well — there are four different sets of chase cards, for a total of 51 different cards. To make it easier to collect them, Fleer has "thoughtfully" provided 48 chase cards in every box of 24 packs — an average of two chase cards in every pack!

The people who buy the boxes will be around two days after the cards' release looking for 4 HoloBlast chase cards each — their box will only supply eight of the twelve cards in that set. They

Spider-Man, Storm, Salomé, Namor™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Produced and distributed exclusively by Fleer Corp.

will have a few others that they will want to trade if collation is poor, but again dealers will be faced with a situation where they can't break down boxes and sell sets and chase cards. Who wants to buy a chase card when the next pack will have more than one? **Vantage** is hopeful, but the potential for these boxes to nose-dive is real, so be careful out there!

AND SEQUELS FOR ALL AGES

Taking their cue from the movies, several other companies are bringing out sequels as well. 21st Century Archives brings us the Vargas Pin-Up Girls III set. This is another fifty-card set, continuing the numbering from the first two sets and showcasing many of the pinups that were done for Esquire. The only chase cards are prism versions of the regular cards, with about three per box (only 17 boxes for a complete set!) Those who are trying for a prism set would do better to watch for the redemption card which shows up once in every ten boxes — it's good for a complete prism set.

Slightly different pinups are those done by Norman Rockwell — pinups of ordinary people in ordinary circumstances in a story-book rural America that probably never existed anywhere but on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post. Comic Images is bringing out Rockwell 2: Saturday Evening Post cards. Instead of the novel woodgrain chase cards from the first set, we now get to chase six chromium cards featuring Holiday pictures, a rare 3-card subset, a Medallion card, and gold-plated "signature" cards. These cards should do well if you live in an area populated by people who rightly or wrongly remember growing up in that America.

Disney rushed out a sequel to **Aladdin**, one that actually went direct to video, and now they have a sequel to the card set. Aladdin II cards from SkyBox feature art from the Return of Jafar as well as the ongoing television show. Four chase cards per box feature the genie on metallic ink cards, and some demand for the nine chase cards can be expected.

CHASING AFTER COLLECTIBLE GAMING CARDS

The collectible card games market is starting to explode, fueled in part by the long lead time between solicitations and actual deliveries. **Vantage** has watched carefully as dealers have ordered cards based on the number of current players, only to see the supply of cards evaporate because of the large number of new players when the cards finally appeared.

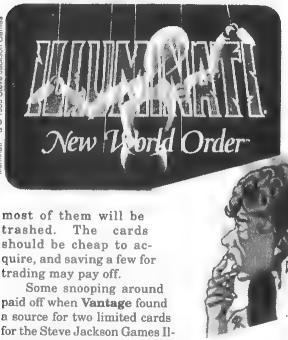
Star Trek: The Next Generation™ & © 1988 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. DC Comics Authorized User.

The Star Trek: Next Generation collectible card game had a low initial print run, and prices for them nearly doubled in a month even though the unlimited cards were readily available. While gamers continue to buy packs, hoping for a Data or Enterprise card, there is another market that has been bypassed — the Trek collectors. These people don't care at all about the game, but the card set is so well done that they are clamoring for sets. That's right, sets. Most of them are confused that they cannot get a set from a box, and don't understand the rare, uncommon, common distribution that is alien to normal card sets.

Enter what is soon to be one of the most sought-after factory sets ever — the Star Trek: Next Generation Game card sets. These will have silver borders rather than black or white, and will not contain any special cards (as originally solicited), but **Vantage** expects the Trekkies and Trekkers will fall all over each other stampeding to pick up a set before they're all gone. There was some price appreciation for the Magic: The Gathering factory sets, but there was no underlying collector base for that as there is for this set. Find one early, or do without!

Limited edition cards for card games are becoming more popular as well. The February copy of Advance Comics will have an exclusive Sim City card for the Mayfair game. The jury is still out on the potential success for this game, and there will be zillions of them around (since Advance Comics is used for ordering by retailers, who order about the same number of copies every month), but

Enter what is soon to be one of the most sought-after factory sets ever



Illuminati™ & © 1995 Steve Jackson Games

most of them will be trashed. The cards should be cheap to acquire, and saving a few for trading may pay off.

Some snooping around paid off when **Vantage** found a source for two limited cards for the Steve Jackson Games Illuminati: New World Order card game. Issue 12 of Pyramid magazine comes with two cards that won't be available anywhere else. Comic store dealers had to order Pyramid before sales of the game itself began, leaving them unsure that the game would be a success (although **Vantage** expects rapid sell-through and lots of price appreciation for the rare cards). More importantly, the solicitations to Diamond and Capital City (the two major distributors for these stores) did NOT include any information about these cards! While game stores had a chance to get this information, and dealers who looked around could find out, most stores will not order extra copies of Pyramid — so maybe you should pick up a few extra copies as soon as you can!

Vantage has also seen some of the Illuminati cards, and we've noticed that many of the cards contain the "eye in the pyramid" symbol. Are there some cards that don't have the symbol? Will there be special rules for those cards that do or don't have the symbol? SJG simply smiles and winks when you ask them — so examine your cards carefully, and be careful when you trade.

TELEVISION VIEWS

SkyBox is bringing out Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman cards. While **Vantage** doesn't expect to see customers lining up to buy the photo cards which make up most of this set, the chase cards are a different story. There is a nine-card subset that features artwork by Boris Vallejo and Julie Bell, perhaps the most popular pair of artists around the card scene. There will be limited demand for the prism chase cards that are also available, but **Vantage** expects collectors to line up for the portrait chase cards.

The WildC.A.T.s Animated Cards from WildStorm feature a staggering 135 cards in its set. Add to this a nine-card animation cel set and a nine-card foil-etched set and you have more than enough to collect — but there's also a five-card oversized card set (one per box). This set features artwork from the television show, but without the Good Girl artwork which sold the previous WildStorm set, **Vantage** doesn't expect as much interest in these cards. One plus: packs should be available for $1.00 to $1.25, which is accurately aimed at the audience for these cards.

VIEW FROM THE ART GALLERY

FPG again offers up two new card sets, each on their thicker, high-quality 18-point card stock. The David Mattingly and Bob Eggleton Fantasy Art sets each feature extremely realistic fantasy art, including numerous book covers that should be familiar to readers who may not recognize their names. Metallic Storm cards and autographed cards are here as well. While it might seem that there are already too many art card sets on the market, the FPG sets continue to sell at about the same level month after month, indicating that there are some collectors out there with enough

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money to pick up a box or set of everything that hits their fancy.

A more risky set is the L. Ron Hubbard card set from Comic Images. This set features artwork from numerous big name artists, all of them producing artwork for the works of the late writer L. Ron Hubbard. The hook for this set is the six-card chromium chase set from Frazetta — these will no doubt prove popular even if the set doesn't do well.

THE SPECULATIVE CORNER

Lost in the pack this month is a set of cards that feature breathtaking art — the Gargoyles from SkyBox. Using pictures from the Disney cartoon show, this set of 90 cards should surprise a lot of people. The gothic artwork may attract people who have never seen or heard of the show, so success will depend on how well the cards are marketed to the non-television show audience.

The chase cards are exciting for a set that is sneaking past everybody: double-sided Spectra-Etch cards (like those from the DC Master series) and lenticular holograms (like those from the Lion King set). Take a look at these cards as soon as they appear — **Vantage** will certainly pick up a set or two, and you may want to have a few extra boxes on hand in case demand heats up. It helps that these cards will come out costing "only" about $1.50 per pack.

QUICK NOTES

Mmmm-mmmm, Good? That's what Collect-A-Card is hoping with its latest release, the Campbell Soup Cards. This is the company that all but created a new market with the Coca-Cola cards, and the rosy-cheeked Campbell Kids are now following their lead. We can only assume that the cards will feature artwork from ad campaigns of the past rather than small versions of Andy Warhol artwork, but that still shouldn't create the demand the soft drink cards did (after all, they don't have the polar bears).

Another Julie Bell Keepsake Collection is around this month — Comic Images is offering the Soft As Steel Keepsake Collection. This is a set of six frame-size cards and a mini press sheet that reprints all of them in regular card size.

Looking for something different? No, we mean really, really different. A company called EPG is releasing JAMPAC, a quarterly magazine that comes on 50 cards. Photos and text about sports, entertainment, horoscopes, etc. Well, at least it only costs about $4, and years from now the first issue may be a real collectors' item (especially if there really is a second issue). No word of any chase cards — but keep an eye out.

An interesting experiment comes from Fleer this month: Fleer 1995 Easter Cards. Each pack contains seven cards that tell a story, and there are six stories altogether. Since the packs reveal which story is in each pack, kids (very young kids, most likely girls) can collect all six stories for just $5-$6. But wait, there are still chase cards — there are six foil-stamped cards, one for each story, randomly packed and hidden in the packs. The risk — some of the stories will sell better than others, and you might wind up with lots of copies of "Mother Goose" and no copies of "Peter Cottontail's Surprise". Look for dealers to bust the packs, remove the foils, and sell sets of all forty-two cards for $4, completely undoing Fleer's attempts to hook little kids on the thrill of opening packs and finding chase cards.

ACTION FIGURES

Been to a show or a store lately? If you have, you've noticed that a surprising number of them are now carrying action figures. A closer look will show that some of them have surprisingly high prices — this is because the industry has discovered the value of "chase figures" — toys that only show up once or twice in a case while other figures in the line are showing up much more frequently. Look for **Vantage** to have expanded coverage of this phenomenon soon.

One thing to look for now (can't leave you without a taste of what to look for!) comes from Todd Toys. The Spawn figure set has had six figures altogether — two Spawns and a Violator that are common (and selling for $8-$10), Overkill and Tremor figures which are much less common (selling for $12-$15) and a Clown figure which is downright rare (and fetching $15-$25). The Violator comes with several different cards, including a very limited group which come with the chromium Spawn and Violator cards which appeared in Wizard. These will no doubt be worth more than those which contain the common green and brown cards. Clearly you should snap up Clowns reasonable prices, but there is one figure which is even more sought-after, one which most dealers won't even talk about.

The Overkill figure has a parking meter in the package. On most of these meters the rates of 10 cents and 5 cents are clearly printed. On a select few, however, the rate of 5 cents is HAND WRITTEN on the meter. The rumor is that Todd McFarlane wrote that price on there. True or not, this rumor has caused intense demand for the special Overkills. Keep your eyes open!

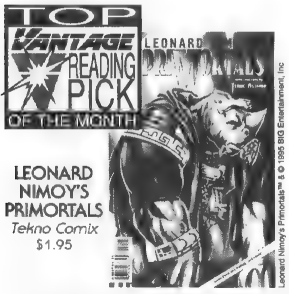
COMICS ARE FOR READING First!

By Rick Keller

Howdy all, and Happy Belated New Year! Yes, I know that this magazine is dated February, but in my personal universe this magazine is coming out in January. So I hope that your holidays were filled with food, fun, many comics, and of course, Vantage magazine.

Before I begin I'd like to thank the people who made this column possible: Vantage creator Rob Golub, who had the gumption to hire me (even after waking up from his drunken stupor.); America Online for being my 'information highway' to the fans and creators who make up the world of comics; all the comic shops in my area who had open minds and the good sense to order Vantage for their shelves; and the boys and girls at Premier Promotions for holding those 'three-for-a-dollar' comic book shows in the South Jersey/Philadelphia area. Finally, thanks and a big wet kiss (a firm handshake for the men) to all of you, the Vantage readers. If not for you, this column would not have happened.

Now on with the reviews...



From the comic book company that gives you a money-back guarantee if not satisfied, comes the story of an alien race coming to Earth. Sure, aliens come to Earth all the time in comics, but these aliens were plucked from the planet's surface many thousands of years ago because of their potential for intelligence. Well, now they've evolved and they're not coming back to sightsee. However, unlike other comic universes, this time we know they're on their way.

The great thing about this book, created by the late Issac Asimov and Star Trek's Leonard Nimoy, and written by Kate Worley, is that it's pure science fiction inlaid with science fact. In it, members of the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) program discover radio signals coming from outer space. In the real world, SETI exists with help from colleges and universities around the country in an effort to find intelligent life in our galaxy. Primortals is also the story of man's first 'Close Encounter' and what they do with the scientific knowledge they've obtained to prepare for the visit. With so much great talent behind it, this book can't lose.

"The great thing about this book is that it's pure science fiction inlaid with science fact.

COMICS ARE FOR READING FIRST

VANTAGE READING PICK

BABE
Dark Horse Comics
$2.50

How can a comic miss when it has space aliens, a beautiful woman who's endowed with great, um, strength, and the talented John Byrne, who writes and draws this four-issue mini-series? The answer is, you can't.

The story centers on Hollywood talent agent Ralph Rowan, his assistant Sylvia, and their adventures with Babe: a red-haired, drop-dead-gorgeous woman who walks out of the ocean surf wearing nothing but her smile. The weird thing, for Hollywood, is she barely speaks (except repeating the word 'Babe') and she has superhuman strength.

While not as silly as his work on Marvel's **She-Hulk**, it definitely doesn't take itself seriously. In fact, the story plays more like an old B-movie serial, complete with golden-age heroes, sidekicks, aliens, and a lot of action. Of course, the golden-age hero is retired, and the aliens are more concerned about fashion and design than conquering the universe, but hey, times change you know. It's a great book to read while you're breaking those New Year's resolutions.

VANTAGE READING PICK

LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES
DC Comics
$1.95

Last summer's Zero Hour series changed the history of the DC Universe as we know it — including the history of its 30th Century heroes. Writers Mark Waid and Tom McGraw have practically taken all that fans have known about the Legion for the past four decades, thrown it into the recycling bin, and started over from their origins. Now, before you **Vantage** readers go out and storm the DC offices, let me calm your rages by saying it definitely works.

The new Legion history is fresh and very innovative. While it leaves the basic origins intact, it also incorporates some of the elements it created in its companion book, Legionnaires, including many of the new names, costumes, and characters. The writers are also setting up another super-hero team, with some familiar faces, to compete with the Legion.

Waid and McGraw portray the teen heroes as both street smart and naive at the same time, revealing that even teens in the 30th Century have the same problems they do in the 20th Century. Yet, the new stories still retain the innocence and brightness of the first Legion stories. If you've never been a Legion fan, this is where you can begin.

VANTAGE READING PICK

ZERO HOUR
DC Comics
$1.50

All right, it didn't have the scope of its universe-shaking predecessor, Crisis on Infinite Earths, but there was definitely some strong storytelling by Dan Jurgens about time paradoxes and their consequences. It also set up some great pre- and post-Zero Hour storylines in the DC Universe (see previous review).

Jurgens has a knack for writing stories involving many super-heroes (Justice League America, the Superman/Panic in the Sky series), and he was able to incorporate almost every hero affected by this event into the five-issue series. While there's plenty of action and surprises (especially the person responsible for the time prob-

lem), there are also many philosophical and moral questions being asked as the time line is reformed. For example, if you had the ability to reform time, would you do it? Zero Hour is definitely the thinking readers comic.

SACHS & VIOLENS
Epic Comics
$2.25

Want to see two of comicdom's finest talents doing something other than super-heroes? Well, here's your chance. Written by Peter David and drawn by George Perez, this series, which appeared in the spring of 1994, foregoes the comics code and presents a story involving, among other things, snuff films (Oh, boy, I feel all warm and toasty inside now).

Sachs is a former army brat who now carries a whip. Violens is a former Vietnam Vet who now carries several automatic weapons. So, you can see the pretense for violence. And there is violence, and swearing, and semi-clothed women.

This is a comic for adults and not for your 12-year-old (although I've heard 12-year-olds using words I've never even heard of). On the other hand, in true David fashion, it's not totally serious. It does have some very funny lines and situations (Violens' Mom owns a sexual toy shop). S&V is a definite change of pace from Hulk and Ultraforce. So, if you're not oversensitive about bad language and blood, this may be the choice for you.

IT'S UNIQUE!

VANTAGE
COMIC & CARD PICKS

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMIC DEALERS
AND SERIOUS COLLECTORS!

INTERVIEW

STRIKEBACK!

THE HUNT FOR NIKITA

Strikeback artwork™ & © 1995 Jonathan Peterson & Kevin Maguire

By Richard Keller

They climbed the DC Comics ladder together — making names for themselves in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Now, they've striking out on their own, striking up a deal with Malibu's striking new creator-owned line, Bravura. They're writer Jonathan Peterson and artist Kevin Maguire, and their new comic is Strikeback. (You knew it had something do with striking, didn't ya?) Vantage spent some time with Jonathan and asked him a little about his and Kevin's new book, as well some good personal stuff.

VANTAGE: *Why did you leave DC Comics?*

Peterson: After seven years behind the desk it just became so much a machine, "Now we will produce this, now we will produce that." When you get behind the scenes of anything, and you begin to learn the secrets of it all, it begins to lose its sense of charm.

VANTAGE: *Do you enjoy freelancing?*

Peterson: I enjoy it. After seven years, I just reached this point where I just sat there one day and realized that I was on the wrong side of the table. I wanted to be on the creative side of comics, not so much managing them. Rather than screaming at the writers, I'd rather have someone yelling at me for my plot. It was so frustrating for me because I had such a vision for what I wanted to see, I realized that the only way I was going to achieve that vision was to cross to the creative side.

VANTAGE: *Where did the idea for Strikeback come from? Why did you decide to go to Malibu with it?*

Peterson: It's actually an interesting, twisting kind of story. Strikeback is kind of a throwback to the comics that influenced me growing up. My partner in the book, Kevin Maguire, and I have similar tastes. Speaking for myself, my biggest comic influences were always the Stan (Lee) and Jack (Kirby) comics, which had that sort of wide-

spread appeal and larger-than-life sense, but they also had an inherent sense of fun. I wanted to do a book where I didn't have to chop someone's head off, just to make you think it's cool.

We actually ending up taking the book to Image first, and the creators over there were interested in having us come over. But we ran into a real time problem because Kevin is such a perfectionist, and it took a long time for him to start rolling. We ended hitting some financial constraints, which Malibu offered us a door to get out of.

I'd like to stress that not only did it end up in Malibu, but it ended up with Bravura, because of its sense of creator ownership. And Bravura is filled with people I've always admired and enjoyed their work. Being a part of the creator-owned clique that they were putting together was also definitely a blast. Not only did I get the chance to create and own my own comic, but I got to work side-by-side with the people that I grew up with and had big influences on me.

***VANTAGE:** What's the premise of Strikeback?*

Peterson: It's an interesting hybrid. I look at the book and I see a '60s book. But I don't want that to throw people, thinking that it's old hat. I would like to think that what it has is sort of the adventure and spirit of the '60s book, when things were larger-than-life, and it was really a lot of fun. What we're trying to do, between the writing and the art style of Kevin, is trying to go for a 'Moonlighting' sensibility.

The two stars of the book are Nikita Dragonrider and Rascal. They've been in love since college. And on the eve of Nikki's 25th Birthday, Doberman and Rotweiler, the world's two greatest bounty hunters, appear to kidnap Nikita. Rascal tries to rescue her. In the course of the rescue, he ends up meeting a martial artist known as Midnight Devil, who becomes the reader's eyes. He becomes caught up in the adventure, and you begin to see what is Rascal's and Nikita's world.

You quickly learn that Rascal has ties to an organization called Strikeback, which isn't a group in the sense of the Justice League, but is a confederated sense of friends who can call upon each other. The code word they use to summon each other is Strikeback. They all band together to see who's taken Nikita. And what you find out is that her own parents have kidnaped her. The reason why is basically the emotional thrust of the mini-series. What you eventually discover towards the end of it is really not quite what you're led to believe. You get halfway through the mini-series and you think it's for dire purposes. In the end, what it involves is other dimensions and time travel.

***VANTAGE:** Will this become an ongoing series?*

Peterson: We would like to treat it similar to the Star Wars trilogy — do it in sets of five or six. To be honest, if this was a monthly, we've already planned out to issue #35. We really do have a long stack of plans. We had already planned to do it in a trilogy format. For example, the first mini-series sets up what will happen in the third mini-series. There's a definite payoff sense to what were building towards.

***VANTAGE:** How is it working with Kevin Maguire?*

Peterson: It's fantastic. Kevin is like an old friend. We've known each other for years. We met when we both coming up the ladder at DC. We share a similar interest in things like Godzilla movies, the Bond films, Chinese action films. Plus, there are a lot of personal views in the kinds of comics we like.

So what ends up happening is we have a great creative partnership. We do every aspect of the book together: we plot the book, Kevin thumbnails it and comes back to me. From my old editorial experience, we work with that. Then he draws it, we dialogue it together, and so on and so on. It's great. There's not a sense of a writer/artist team, but more of a creative team.

Strikeback artwork ™ & © 1995 Jonathan Peterson & Kevin Maguire

THE VIEW FROM OBLIVION

By Corey Bond

The difference between a Trekkie and a Trekker is a subtle one. My definitions of the two will undoubtedly raise protests from one or the other, but my intention is to be objective, not objectionable.

People who describe themselves as "Trekkies" are typically rather laid back individuals who share a great fondness for the Star Trek mythos, but retain a sense of humor about it and have more important things going on in their lives. Those who insist on the newer term, "Trekker," take their Star Trek seriously, and often are offended when referred to as a "Trekkie." In other words, "Trekker," like all politically correct terminology, lacks a sense of humor. Ironically, those who hold Star Trek and its obsessive fans in disdain refer to those fans as "Trekkies," when in actuality it is the Trekkers that they are annoyed with in the first place.

Personally, I often deny being a Star Trek fan in order to avoid the entire stigmatic process. But just between you and me, as I sit here writing this column I'm wearing a glow-in-the-dark Borg t-shirt, the soundtrack is playing on my CD player, and a tribble is perched on my computer for good luck. Furthermore, having seen Star Trek: Generations a second time now, I've decided that I am not wholly satisfied.

I suppose that now is as good a time as any to insert a **** Spoiler Warning **** for those of you who haven't seen Generations yet and don't want any key plot points ruined for you. I'm about to discuss the movie in detail, and my analysis will mean much more to you if you're familiar with the story.

The movie opens in the 23rd century with Captain Kirk, Chekov, and Scotty tagging along on the maiden voyage of the Enterprise-B as it tours our solar system for publicity purposes. The captain of this new Enterprise is John Herridan, who is portrayed by the same actor who played Ferris Bueller's best friend Cameron. His scenes are highly entertaining since the characters of Cameron and Herridan are essentially identical, making it easy to imagine how the lost-soul high school student would have turned out as a Starfleet Captain. When Herridan is faced with the problem of two transport vessels about to be torn apart by an energy ribbon, I half-expected the teacher from Ferris Bueller's Day Off to show up on the bridge and ask, "Now how are we going to save the passengers and crew? Anyone? Anyone?"

My main problem with this opening sequence of the film, which includes Scotty beaming over a few survivors from the transport ships (including Guinan and the movie's villain, Soran) and Captain Kirk getting sucked out into space while saving the Enterprise-B from destruction, is the fact that it is a blatant contradiction of Star Trek continuity. Scotty is present for the mission that history records as being the one that finally did Cap-

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tain Kirk in. Yet when Scotty later turns up in the 24th century in the Next Generation episode "Relics," he asks if Captain Kirk has come to rescue him. The implication in "Relics" is that Kirk was still alive and kicking when Scotty went into stasis, yet in Generations he all but witnesses Kirk's death.

After Kirk's "death," the movie jumps ahead 78 years to the Next Generation era. It turns out that the energy ribbon that destroyed the ship carrying Guinan and Soran is actually a phenomenon called the Nexus. Being inside the Nexus, apparently, is a wonderful experience, and Soran is plotting a way to return to it. The crew of the Enterprise-D must stop him, because Soran's plan involves the incidental deaths of over 2 million people. Complicating the Enterprise crew's efforts is the fact that Soran is in cahoots with the renegade Klingons Lursa and B'Etor, who want to use the weapon he's created to conquer the Klingon Empire.

Not that these Klingons, in my opinion, represent a credible threat. The only thing protecting their little Bird of Prey from the Galaxy-class flagship of the Federation is the fact that they have Geordi held hostage. So what do they do after exchanging Geordi for Captain Picard? They effectively release their new hostage by beaming him down to Veridian 3, where he can confront Soran, without so much as a couple of Klingon guards. And to compound this idiocy, the Enterprise crew does nothing to take advantage of the situation, either by attacking the Bird of Prey or making any real effort to rescue Picard. Sure, Riker mentions that ionization in the atmosphere is interfering with their sensors, but Veridian 3 is just a big rock with three things on it: 2 life forms (Picard and Soran) and a really big force field. And they're all in the same place. How hard could that be to locate? The sensors seemed to work okay for the seven seasons that Next Generation was on the air.

And while we're discussing the Enterprise's sensors, let's back up to an earlier scene where Geordi gets captured. Geordi and Data are investigating Soran's secret lab aboard a space station. It is surrounded by a "damping field," which prevents communication in or out, and prevents the Enterprise from locating Geordi and Data with their sensors. Yet when the Klingons show up to get Soran, they have no problem communicating with him to get his coordinates and beam him out. Now I'm sure some Trekkie or Trekker out there could explain this to me, but that isn't the point. I sometimes think that the only way to get your average Star Trek plot to remain cohesive is to play Marvel Comics' old "No-Prize" game, where readers would write in to point out errors in the stories and then invent bizarre explanations to justify the errors. Like this one: In the movie, Soran launches a missile from Veridian 3 to its sun, and it only takes 11 seconds before the missile impacts. Now, it takes approximately eight minutes for light from our sun to reach Earth, and since Veridian 3 is a Class M planet, I assume the distance is about the same. So Soran's missile was flying faster than the speed of light? Did he attach warp engines to it?

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"Personally, I often deny being a Star Trek fan in order to avoid the entire stigmatic process"

But enough nit-picking. My primary complaint with the story in Generations is the inconsistent depiction of its major element, the Nexus. Guinan, who was inside the Nexus until she was rescued by the Enterprise-B back in the 23rd century, describes the experience as being "inside joy," and says that neither she nor any of the other passengers wanted to leave. Soran is so obsessed with

"Star Trek is not science fiction, Star Trek is Star Trek. And Generations is very Star Trek"

the Nexus that he is willing to destroy entire solar systems to get back to it. Guinan tells Picard that if he goes into it, he won't care about her, the Enterprise, Soran, or anything else. Yet when Picard and Kirk actually do enter the Nexus, they both quickly surmise that the perfect life within is not real, and that the experience is therefore unfulfilling. I find it odd that two mere humans could so quickly dismiss the Nexus, while Guinan and Soran, both El-Aurians, have longed for it for 78 years. El-Aurians are supposed to have a heightened awareness of reality; if you recall, Guinan sensed that the alternate time line in "Yesterday's Enterprise" was the wrong one.

Furthermore, in order to save the 2 million inhabitants of Veridian 4, not to mention the crew of the Enterprise-D, Kirk and Picard use the Nexus as a vehicle to travel through time and space, returning to Veridian 3 before Soran launches his missile. My question is this: if the fantasy worlds of Kirk and Picard in the Nexus are not real, then why is the Veridian 3 that they return to the real one? And if the Nexus will allow you to return to real places in time and space, why did Kirk originally go back to a mere facsimile of a life with his long lost love Antonia, and not the real thing?

As for Picard, how does he justify going back in time to change the past, when he's always argued that altering history is wrong? Soran had done nothing to alter the time line. Therefore, the destruction of the Veridian system and the deaths of the Enterprise crew were "what was meant to be." Yet this time he decides to play God and alter past events. Was it because he was overcome with emotion, unable to pass up the opportunity to save the lives of the two million inhabitants of Veridian 4, plus the crew of his ship? If so, then why didn't he go back in time a day or two more to prevent the deaths of his brother and nephew, whom he had been mourning the entire movie?

The real answer to many of the above questions is simple: the writers were forced to contrive the screenplay in such a way as to give Kirk a purpose and a heroic death. Many of the weak areas of the plot are a result of forcing the situation in such a way that Kirk could (a) meet face to face with Picard, which the fans have theoretically been clamoring for, and (b) allow him to save the day (after all, you can't have the Great Captain just standing around as window dressing). But this simple fact does not address the more basic questions involving time travel paradoxes. If Picard traveled back in time to Veridian 3, why didn't he run into himself, since he was already there? When scenes are replayed to cue the audience that we're going back in time, you see the original Picard getting shot at by Soran. Yet when the "second" Picard shows up, the one from the Nexus, the first Picard is nowhere to be seen. Why aren't there two Picards now? And if Picard changed time by traveling through the Nexus, but a result of his changing time is that he never enters the Nexus, then how is the past altered? Anyone else getting a headache? I suppose there is an equally simple explanation for these plot anomalies, and it has been said many times before: Star Trek is not science fiction, Star Trek is Star Trek. And Generations is very Star Trek.

(Corey Bond, Trekkie in Oblivion, has some good news and bad news for you diehard Star Trek fans. The good news: Captain Picard's fish, Livingston, survived the crash of the Enterprise's saucer section. The bad news: Data's cat, Spot, was the first to find him...)

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VANTAGE VIEWPOINTS

13000 W. Blue Mound Road, Suite #110, Elm Grove, WI 53122.

Send us your quick two cents for Vantage Viewpoints! We want to know what your dream crossover would be, what you think of this month's news, what you're having for dinner tonight, or some other pointless drivel! Send to: 13000 W. Blue Mound Rd., Suite 110, Elm Grove, WI 53122. Fax: 414-797-7960.

Even though you don't seem to like it, I find Comics' Greatest World titles to be very good reads. I think more credit is due even though they're not "HOT"!

— Larry Brown, Moody AFB, GA

Hey, Larry, don't get us it trouble with Dark Horse. We like 'em, but you're right. There's not much after-market activity for them.

Why did you put coupon on coupon (this contest and signature series page)? Now I have to choose which to use. I would have liked a signed Flash.

— David Ganaway, Huntsville, AL

Ooops. If we ever do that again, David, you can fill out both sides and send it in! We'll just photocopy a side and make sure both coupons are sent to the right place here at Vantage HQ.

Great magazine! **Shi** #1 was a great pick. I'm glad I checked it out after I saw it in Vantage!! Keep it up.

— Nick Hughes, Northbend, OR

Boy, you really make it hard for a guy to win something.

— Anthony Galluzzo, East Haven, CT

Now, now, Anthony, our contests are run fair and square. It's not us that's your problem, it's the odds. We're printing your quote, though, for the second month in a row as proof that we're rooting for you.

Dream crossover: Batman & Daredevil.

— Jeff Beuse, Mt. Vernon, WA

11-7-94, Big Entertainment stock now 7 1/4. Low was 4. I just picked up some.

— Claudia G. Gilman, Hellertown, PA

Dream crossover: Spawn & Prophet.

— Cody English, Oklahoma City, OK

Good book! How about a discussion of comic art or marketability of signed books?

— Lew Nathan, Northbrook, IL

Hmmmm... not a bad idea. Speaking of signed books, we're working on bringing you even nicer looking certificates of authenticity for current and future offers. Tell us what you think.

Excellent magazine! I have almost all of them. Don't change a thing.

— Charles Simpson, Romerville, IL

I'm glad to find your mag. It is a lot more informative than Wizard™. Thank you.

— Silvio E. Deitch, Pearl River, LA

Enjoy your mag and find it very helpful planning ahead for the "hot books." Keep up the good work!

— Dock H. Brown III, Chicago, IL

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